

## **“Do you like taster menus?” Beyond Hybridity: *The Trip* & *The Trip to Italy***

### **Abstract**

In episode two of the cinematic-televisual hybrid *The Trip*, which has been released to various markets in diverse formats, providing different selections from core content, the protagonists discuss restaurant taster menus, one of which they are about to experience. This essay both utilises established approaches in television studies and examines developments in film and book marketing over two decades to explore how *The Trip* and its sequel *The Trip to Italy* contribute to, exploit, and satirize associated developments in literary, cinematic, and televisual culture. It concludes that, at a time when each of these aspects of art and entertainment, and institutions behind them, face unprecedented pressure from technological change, the series provide taster menus for BBC public service entertainment and educational output.

### **1. Introduction**

*The Trip* (2010) and *The Trip to Italy* (2014) are six-part television series comprising half-hour episodes in the UK on terrestrial channel BBC Two. Each was cut to less than two hours for overseas cinematic release and both the series and the movies are available separately on DVD. Their US theatrical gross, while modest – about two million and 2.9 million dollars respectively – reflects low budgets and likelihood that theatrical release was to promote home entertainment marketing. Television would have covered production costs, and broadcasts attracted respectable viewing figures – two million for the first episode, exceeding the channel’s usual share – as well as critical praise repeated

abroad. The premise is that comedians Steve Coogan and Rob Brydon play versions of themselves hovering uneasily between characters performed previously and tabloid and gossip magazine constructions of their off-screen lives and personalities.

The series were co-produced by the BBC, Baby Cow Productions, Revolution Films, and Arbie (*The Trip*) and SmallMan Productions (*The Trip to Italy*). Coogan co-founded Baby Cow in 1999; BBC Worldwide own 25%. It has made around 300 episodes and features, including various incarnations of Coogan's alter ego Alan Partridge, Coogan's latest movie *Philomena* (Frears 2013), Brydon's *Marion & Geoff* (2000-03), and the massively successful *Gavin & Stacey* (BBC Three/Two/One 2007-10), also featuring Brydon. Arbie – Brydon's initials – is a venture he owns with Talkback Thames, the company that launched Alan Partridge; SmallMan is also Brydon's enterprise, named after his (now literally) trademark impression of a small man in a box. Baby Cow has co-produced features with Revolution Films, founded by Britain's most prolific director Michael Winterbottom and producer Andrew Eaton: notably those directed by Winterbottom and starring Coogan, including *24 Hour Party People* (2002) and *A Cock and Bull Story* (2005). The latter, co-starring Brydon, is a postmodern adaptation of Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759-67) that crosses reality and fiction, realism and heritage cinema, character and performer, past and present, literary reverence and anarchic playfulness, *histoire* and *discours*. The opening minutes comprise competitive and, paradoxically, supposedly off-screen banter between Coogan and Brydon concerning purportedly real-life relationships, attempts to better each other's impersonations of film stars, and bickering over which of the pair is this movie's star. Coogan appears vain and ignorant, but also awkward and vulnerable, while Brydon seems grounded and loyal.

Fascination lies in how much is scripted, as continuity editing implies, or improvised, as wit and spontaneity and naturalistic lighting and hand-held shooting suggest.

*The Trip* and *The Trip to Italy*, also Winterbottom directed, continue this relationship and format. Coogan is commissioned to review restaurants around the English Lake District. When his girlfriend withdraws he offers Brydon her place as travelling companion, characteristically proposing a 60:40 fee split. There follow car journeys, conversations over exquisite meals in expensive hotels and restaurants, off-screen and on-screen professional and personal drama – in phone discussions concerning potential film roles, Brydon’s affectionate calls to his wife, and Coogan’s infidelities and family tensions – against mountainous scenery. Through the first series, the characters follow Wordsworth and Coleridge’s footsteps, as Al Pacino and Ray Winstone impressions temporarily halt for recitals of Romantic poetry in its imputed setting. *The Trip to Italy* extends this conceit with restaurant visits in pursuit of Byron and Shelley.

## **2. Hybrid forms**

Although *The Trip* was BAFTA nominated (2011) for Best Situation Comedy and Coogan won Best Male Performance in a Comedy Role, both series evade classification. “Winterbottom’s work,” Bruce Bennett notes, “tend[s] towards genre transformation. Winterbottom’s films frequently invoke familiar genres ... while incorporating unfamiliar, unexpected or incompatible elements” (2014, 105). Winterbottom intensifies a general propensity, identified by Timothy Corrigan, whereby “contemporary genre” displaces “a naturalized public ritual” with “performance of denaturalized and appropriated generic conventions” (1991, 141). Moreover, movie genres were never fixed, and major studios

avoid them, instead proffering an unprecedented cinematic experience (Altman 1999). This does not, however, deny genre's heuristic usefulness, provided its descriptive, non-essential, and provisional qualities are not forgotten. Television, meanwhile, rarely seeks, or demonstrates, generic purity in constantly pursuing novelty and topicality. These series, nevertheless, postmodernize beyond hybridity, producing what might be termed, in accordance with their culinary theme, a *mélange*. Eugenie Brinkema notes that *haute cuisine* originated with the *liaison*, whereby flour binds or vinegar emulsifies butter and cream (2014, 156) – akin to how the programmes' saucy protagonists, solidly wholesome and acerbic respectively, enrich and enliven entertainment. Less blended in *The Trip* (as both series are called hereafter except when distinguishing them), genres are partnered and mixed; reflecting televisual origins, they microcosmically represent a traditional network's broader schedule – a point to which this study returns.

Comedic self-fictionalization is hardly unprecedented, from *Hancock's Half Hour* (BBC 1956-60) to Matt LeBlanc in *Episodes* (BBC Two / Showtime Network 2011- ). The convention serves celebrity culture. Conflating role with performer assists image management and movement between media or projects, negotiates continuity and change, and exploits audience desires for identification and truly to know celebrities. Reflexive manifestations question authenticity, mode of address, pleasure, realism, implied authorship, audio-visual conventions, and contradictions arising from self-awareness. *The Trip* further conflates representation, authorship and intention in the relationship between performers, director, and production companies.

Not least *The Trip*'s observational mockumentary aspects stress performance, through

impressions – impersonations – that persist to near tedium. If these actors can transform themselves so readily, how can viewers tell whether they ever stop acting? The appeal partly echoes “first wave ... celebrity portrait films ... [that] purported to move past a constructed public personality and reveal a more authentic, private self” (Middleton 2014, 55). *The Trip*, however, exceeds Direct Cinema and vérité portraits, such as *Primary* (Drew 1960), *Jane* (Pennebaker 1962), *Meet Marlon Brando* (Maysles 1966), *Don’t Look Back* (Pennebaker 1967), or *Mingus* (Reichman 1968), all of which, Paul Arthurs states, “purport to offer intimate views of personal identity that exceed in truth value those of competing agencies of reportage such as still photos and newspaper and magazine profiles” (2003, 102). Brydon and Coogan’s characterizations involve compulsive impersonation inseparable from performer and character alike, rendering these indistinguishable. Calls with managers, agents, and partners reinforce how they are supposedly vacationing from their primary careers: being themselves, away from scrutiny. Yet those on the other end are actors, some recognizable from the stars’ other work.

*The Trip*, furthermore, exceeds *This is Spinal Tap* (1984), which, parodying interactive documentaries, presents fictional celebrities in fictional circumstances. *The Trip* constructs self-presentation of performers in fictional and real situations nevertheless staged for entertainment. Seriousness and comedy interpenetrate in play that exacerbates uncertainty. One scene ends in slapstick as Coogan vaults a fence, unaware of a ditch beyond, then falls into a river. In an outtake from the sequence the character crosses himself before the altar on entering Bolton Priory. Yet Coogan “says he is now an atheist,” in an interview (Garrahan 2013). (*Philomena*, which Coogan co-scripted and coincidence with *The Trip to Italy* mutually publicized, exacerbates slippage between personae and

motivations as his non-believer character challenges Catholicism's authority and integrity.)

Filmic apparatus never intrudes and there is no interaction with behind the camera. (A major shift occurs in the DVD extras when, after successive out-takes demonstrating scenes' development through repeated on-camera improvisation and rehearsal of roughly scripted exchanges, Winterbottom rises from a car's back seat having been hidden to record dialogue.) Locations are real. No one demonstrates awareness of the camera, which differentiates *The Trip* from conscious performativity of celebrity chat shows or some sitcoms, including *The Office* (BBC Two 2001-03) and *Modern Family* (ABC 2009- ), that certain routines otherwise evoke. Nevertheless multiple set-ups, shot/reverse-shots, and nightmarish continuity logistics while scenes unfold over a meal (or in a moving car or a yacht at sea, with further static and mobile external shots) leave no question these are scrupulously planned conversations (no writer is credited) and surrounding diners are extras. Seeing Coogan and Brydon as if in real life parodies "behind the scenes" bonus features that in turn confirm the enterprise's illusionary nature. Extras include six takes, totalling 43 minutes, from angles inside and outside Coogan's Range Rover and a preceding vehicle, of elaborations, alternately dominated by each principal, of essentially stand-up improvisation. These lasted one minute on air.

The series is, in literary terms, picaresque: episodic satire recounting "escapades of an insouciant rascal who lives by his wits and shows little if any alteration of character through the long succession of his adventures" (Abrams 1993, 130). This takes it beyond road movie – a genre Winterbottom has bent into distinctive variants – to sequential

conflicts and personal crises with each episode covering a new day's journey, arrival, and meal in a different restaurant and the evening in separate hotel rooms where the protagonists reveal supposedly true selves away from each other's combative presence. A certain frisson might result from remembering Coogan's 2011 testimony, concerning privacy, to the British Government's Leveson Enquiry into press standards – and *The Trip to Italy* ensures one does, as Coogan recalls spending huge legal fees against News International. The structure is flexi-narrative (Creeber 2004): stand-alone episodes with discrete internal arrangement – although there is little dramatic form – against development and change across the series as the trip, in paradoxical contrast with *picaresque* characters' inflexibility, metaphorically represents self-discovery.

If that sounds precious for a sitcom about middle-aged blokes worried about receding gums and hairlines it also satirizes masculinity. Partly this involves evocations of Alan Partridge, who spends time in cars and hotel rooms; and Keith in *Marion & Geoff*, set entirely inside cars while, as in *The Trip*, developments occur off screen. Coogan's Range Rover in *The Trip* resembles one in *Alan Partridge: Welcome to the Places of My Life* (Sky Atlantic 2012) that Alan test-drives while touring “Norfolk's twenty-plus car dealerships.” Rivalry over honours and awards, and impersonations of Robert De Niro and Michael Caine, accordingly typify laddish culture familiar from improvisational stand-up – *Whose Line Is It Anyway?* (Channel 4 1988-98), *Mock the Week* (BBC 2005- ) – and “men in motors” programming. *Top Gear* (BBC Two 2002- ), in which Coogan appeared four times, is the world's most-viewed factual programme, although Coogan in 2011 condemned it publicly, following scandal concerning bigoted and racist comments.

*The Trip* nevertheless, in theatrical manifestation, is both road movie and, with the show-biz colleagues' affection, rivalry and interdependence, buddy movie. Emphasis on cars, financial power (and ambition and vulnerability), family responsibilities, aging, anxieties about attractiveness to partners left behind and women encountered – and bedded – on the way, highlights its disquisition on masculinity. An “explicitly desperate genre,” Corrigan states, “the contemporary road movie (and its first cousin, the buddy movie) responds specifically to the recent historical fracturing of the male subject, who has traditionally been the main support of ... a dominant cinema” (1991, 138). *The Trip*'s tone and purpose are distant from brutal, often senseless violence characteristic of tales of charismatic outsiders adrift from society. Nonetheless, identity uncertainties; Coogan's apparent recklessness and diminished self-control – in onscreen slapstick or offscreen infidelities (temptation Brydon succumbs to in *The Trip to Italy*); obsessive intensity of observation and discipline of voice and expression demanded for impressions; and poignancy in unguarded, awkward moments; all indicate repression beneath suave confidence, an inference confirmed (at least fictitiously) in sequences of Coogan dreaming of being courted by Hollywood or confronted by abusive fans as tabloids print publicly humiliating obscene headlines. Although it lacks *The Trip*'s overt reflexivity, Corrigan avers that,

as a genre traditionally focused, almost exclusively, on men and the absence of women, the road movie self-consciously displays the crisis of gender, so central in stabilizations of any genre, around the seemingly peculiar and historically recent proliferations of the threat of male hysteria. (1991, 143)



If genre involves containment through repetition, not just of narrational possibilities but ideological contradiction, such regulation has weakened. Increasingly, Corrigan concludes, genre “dramatize[s] its historical love affair with its own symptoms. Road movies ... crystallize this action more clearly than any other” (1991, 142); *The Trip*, in guise of popular entertainment and parody, compounds ambiguity by manifesting qualities it seeks to control.

Most “films of this genre share ... a quest motif, which propels the usually male characters along the road of discovery,” Corrigan observes (1991, 144). *The Trip*’s buddies desire, variously and inter alia, the perfect meal, international recognition, safe return, an impression surpassing the other’s, anonymity, family, escape from lack of fulfilment, and reconciliation with a son. To quote Corrigan again, in ancient myths and literary convention,

heroes ... embark on a learning experience that becomes most historically determined in bildungsroman tradition: the familiar is left behind or transformed through the protagonist’s movement through space and time, and the confrontations and obstacles that he encounters generally lead, in most cases, to a wiser individual and often a more stable spiritual or social state. (1991, 144)

Switchover between series – Coogan’s career stalls while Brydon gains Hollywood recognition; Coogan initially stops drinking and attempts responsible fatherhood while Brydon sleeps with a woman en route as his marriage becomes strained – inculcates in its protagonists at least greater self-awareness while thwarting expectations. Lack of closure, leaving sequels possible; grounding in the mundane, albeit with glamour and privileged

settings; televisual shooting and editing; episodic structure and broadcast scheduling; emphasis on relationships, speech and the challenge of second-guessing motivations and true identities: all evoke soap operas' "emotional realism" (Ang 1985, 45) alongside more abstract epic qualities of road movies.

*The Trip* is ostensibly a travelogue featuring real places and named restaurants. Inserts of busy kitchens offset food porn that resembles cookbooks and advertisements. While these recall cookery competitions on terrestrial television they introduce social realism of employment and class relations, never far from Winterbottom's concerns, as peacefulness and leisurely conversation at table cede repeatedly, if momentarily, to handheld shots of steamy, noisy work, under harsh lighting, including scraping away of waste. There are quiz show elements too: not just constant challenges to recognize quotations or allusions but, in *The Trip to Italy*, a regular multiple-choice "guess the bill" whereby viewers can compete with Coogan since Brydon hosts *Would I Lie to You?* (BBC One 2009- ) and the Saturday peak-time *The Guess List* (BBC One 2014), even if the ritual incorporates an impression of another presenter. Moreover, Sandra M. Gilbert insists, naked competition now characterizes prime time cooking shows (2014, 217), an observation extendable to table where, in fine dining, competitiveness has always informed wit, not just in *The Trip* but popular reality TV series such as *Come Dine with Me* (Channel 4 2005- ); Coogan, for example, quotes Gore Vidal's waspish observations about Truman Capote. Some cultural references only Britons of a certain age could understand: impressions of Basil Brush, Ronnie Corbett, and Terry Wogan, or songs by Morrissey, presumably excised in feature versions. Others might appeal internationally, such as Brydon's imitations of his Welsh compatriots Anthony Hopkins, Richard Burton, and Tom Jones. Architecture and

landscapes with literary associations equally serve overseas Anglophilia, with consequences for tourism. A rented Mini in *The Trip to Italy* is – as the characters acknowledge – forever associated with Michael Caine in *The Italian Job* (Collinson 1969) and was possibly, Coogan alleges, selected only for Brydon to deliver an impression Coogan pre-empted with his own. Likewise the Range Rover, Mischa's idea – Coogan's American girlfriend – stamps *The Trip* as distinctively British. As *Downton Abbey* (ITV 2010- ) confirms, and Andrew Higson has pointed out, “inserting America” into a show enhances exportability (2003, 143). Nor can it be overlooked that, as an American commentator recounts, “The great Danish writer Isak Dinesen composed ‘Babette’s Feast’ when a British friend invited her to ‘Write about food; Americans are obsessed with food’” (Gilbert 2014, 259).

### **3. Hybrid pleasures**

These qualities fulfil John Corner's typology of televisual pleasures (1999). “Visual pleasure” he exemplifies with “places, spaces, and times which hold pleasurable associations (e.g. holiday destinations, evocations of history)” (94); these illustrations, describing locations in both series of *The Trip*, equally include restaurants. “Para-sociality” connects with celebrity through the protagonists’ “regular, familiar, informal address and their use of voice and face in an essentially domestic communicative performance” (95), which covers behind-the-scenes reality modes as well as soap conventions. “Dramatic pleasures” (95-96) are self-explanatory, although one might note awkward moments, exposing a gap between self-presentation and the judgmental eye of the camera and the viewer; this Jason Middleton (2014) associates both with

documentary since Michael Moore and with “cringe comedy”, which he dates back to *The Office*, although British viewers might trace it further, at least to *The Day Today* (BBC Two 1994), the first programme to feature Alan Partridge. “Few situations could be as awkward as the demand to ‘just be yourself’ on camera, and to proceed with your activities as if the camera were not present,” Middleton begins (1), encapsulating challenges apparently set to Brydon and Coogan and discomfort produced in moments such as Coogan trying to get into Dove Cottage after arriving at closing-time, or the instant when, alone in a bathroom, he examines his reflection and crumples into despair. Moreover, restaurants themselves are theatrical: “The Italian sommelier is far from home but impersonates Italy for New Yorkers. The French *patron* incarnates Paris but we are actually dining in Chicago or San Francisco” (Gilbert 2014, 230) – although if we *are* in authentic locations, such as *The Trip*’s rural England or Italy, establishments serve visitors idealized regional and historical identity. “Knowledge” embraces cultural capital required to decode the programme and what Corner emphasizes, self-improvement (1999, 96-97): here, what audiences might learn of poetry; the nature and price of meals in restaurants they might never visit; acting, in spontaneous master classes Coogan and Brydon present to each other at table. Knowledge, too, includes privileged access *The Trip* purports to offer as well as specialised satisfaction from sharing the joke. As Middleton explains, citing Jon Dovey, “reflexive documentary filmmaking ... replaces an older regime of truth with a new one based upon an ‘ironic self-referentiality’ and a highly controlled exposure of the filmmaker’s personal identity” (2014, 4). “Comedy” (Corner 1999, 97-98) requires no clarification, while “fantasy” might involve imagining dining in places Brydon and Coogan visit, or sharing repartee with these embodiments of

“wealth, talent, and power” (98). *New York Times* columnist Ruth Reichl indeed noted that “if she’s recognized, she’ll get the kind of extraordinary attention that only ‘the rich and the powerful’ – and food critics – get”; but also, “Every restaurant is a theater, and the truly great ones allow us to indulge in the fantasy that we are rich and powerful” (quoted by Gilbert 2004, 226). Corner further suggests: “realist drama may induce fantasy pleasures for some viewers and, for instance, travel, food, and motoring programmes as well as documentaries and history series [all describe *The Trip*] may contain strong inducements of this kind” (1999, 98). “Distraction, diversion, and routine” (99) cover many reasons for watching. The next section explores another.

#### **4. Cine-literary culture**

In the first episode, Brydon implores Coogan to stop for a motorway breakfast: “You could write: ‘I’m starting off with what real people eat’.”

“No, that’s been done before,” Coogan replies.

“Everything’s been done before,” Brydon responds – adding: it has to be different or better.

Within minutes Brydon is teaching Coogan niceties of tasting wine in a manner that might be didactic also for viewers. An obvious intertext is the American movie *Sideways* (Payne 2004). This features two friends on a car journey (and voyage of self-discovery) to real wineries and restaurants amid scenic landscapes. It includes instruction on how to taste and describe wines, how grapes require different conditions, and close-ups of many wine labels and splendid meals. The pair visits the mother of one of them; Coogan and

Brydon also call on Coogan's – fictional – parents. Some similarities are generic. Road movies feature "male buddies, usually a pair whose questing will only be distracted or, at best, complemented by the women who intrude" (Corrigan 1991, 144). Others, nevertheless, seem intentional: in *A Cock and Bull Story* both Coogan and Brydon tell their agent they would screen test for Alexander Payne – director of *Sideways*, an arthouse hit a year previously – and in *The Trip* Coogan dreams of top directors, including Payne, lining up to work with him.

*Sideways* exemplifies what Jim Collins terms "cine-literary culture" (2010), a concept that illuminates *The Trip*. He quotes novelist John Barth on how literature became so inscrutable it needed a "priestly industry of explicators, annotators, allusion chasers to mediate" with readers (2010, 20). Such "religious tropes", Collins explains, typify "culture as a transcendent experience within a profane society, ... that could be enjoyed only by restricting access" (20). Although some adaptations, including *A Cock and Bull Story*, make cultural capital more easily accessible, arthouse cinema consolidates comparable boundaries; its characteristics involve limited distribution, esoteric festivals, and marketing through auteurism rather than genre, stardom, or spectacular attractions. Literary criticism and film studies – united in indifference to dealing seriously with adaptations although otherwise mutually antipathetic – perpetuate similar tendencies. A hybrid, populist, cine-literary culture, Collins maintains, responded by marginalising both.

Encouraged by mainstream crossover of low-budget "heritage" films including *A Room With a View* (Ivory 1985) and *Howards End* (Ivory 1992), and rapid growth of distributor

Miramax, who handled many adaptations, by the 1990s major studios supported “specialty” affiliates. These blurred independent and mainstream production. Alternatives to blockbusters cultivated niche audiences (Higson 2003), diversified risk and encouraged innovation. Literary-themed movies, migrating from arthouse to multiplex, were increasingly nominated for, and won, Best Picture prizes; accordingly they “exponentially” widened audiences, realigned tastes, expectations, and values (Collins 2010, 144), and dissolved boundaries between art and commerce, seriousness and pleasure.

In parallel, Oprah’s Book Club realigned publishing globally, affecting which books get accepted and promoted and, in turn, how authors approach writing and agents commissioning. Novels, and adaptations, now fetishize literature; listing titles becomes an assertion of quality – see, for example, *The Reader* (1997), already an Oprah selection and top seller when filmed. This propensity, Collins argues, feeds mystical conviction that literature’s function is to inspire and provide courage to make choices; fiction overlaps with self-help and self-actualization. Along with Internet forums, such as Amazon’s that evolved rapidly from feedback mechanism into discussion community, and neighbourhood book groups, Collins characterizes such ventures as finishing schools in taste. They compensate, he argues, for mass higher education’s failure to effect personal transformation.

Beyond teaching what to read, these new formations promote consumerist lifestyle. Richard and Judy’s Book Club in the UK is sponsored by Thornton’s chocolate and affiliated with a wine club so members know what to serve at readers’ gatherings.

Oprah's website recommends pyjamas – available exclusively – for when snuggling with a book into an armchair, also on offer, after drying with luxury towels following the scented bath with soothing candles and that month's choice of relaxing music. Tourism, gardening, and decorating feature, depending on the book. But aggressive marketing appears democratic, bypassing professional critics, academics, and pundits, as how you *feel* is important – how *you* feel, shared at reading groups or online. Primarily, what Collins terms "Miramaxing" celebrates and unites passionate authorship, passionate reading – and, in the content of both best-selling novels and cinematic adaptations, passionate, authentic, transcendent sex. Franchises appear to gather producers and consumers and readers and filmgoers into "a shared community of book lovers" (2010, 149).

Serious literary discussion was always for the elite. Reading novels, plays and poetry – let alone analysing and writing about them – requires time. An aristocratic sign of belonging in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the mark of cultivation, became in the 20<sup>th</sup> a specialized academic pursuit. Taste, until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, was rarely considered. One had it or not; and although you could strive to acquire it, there was little sense of how this might be done. Online forums, linked with product marketing, now replace experts. The "common reader" has become the "avid or passionate" reader (Collins, 43), creating new connoisseurship, including what to drink, eat, wear, sit on, watch, decorate in a "convergence of literary and consumer experiences" (46). Taste has become pervasive lifestyle (12). Brinkema stresses conflation – pertinent here to cine-literary values – of "what is in 'good taste' with what tastes good" (2014, 116); she notes "both senses of 'taste' – flavor and texture, discernment and refinement" (295).



## 5. Taste and consumption

How such developments inform *The Trip*'s commercial and critical reception can be examined by turning to a foundational television studies text, Richard Dyer's *Light Entertainment* (1973). Accounting for pleasures of peak-time variety shows, Dyer posits concepts still broadly appropriable to other output: these cluster under the headings "obliteration," "contrast," and "incorporation" (23-37).

Obliteration substitutes "conspicuous consumption" (24) – in *The Trip* expensive food and wine, cars of the kind exported to America, charming hotels – for everyday life's unpleasantness which, apart from cutaways to kitchen work (that nevertheless stress artistry and craft as much as labour), registers only in shots of crowded traffic such as accompany Brydon's reference to "real people." Gilbert traces contemporary gastronomy – central to *The Trip*'s premise and connotations – to post-war reaction against rationing, fostered by overseas tourism, 1960s' counterculture, and gender and identity politics, a complex part of English-speaking history in which figures including British writer Elizabeth David have been internationally influential (2014, 18-19). Its evolution echoes what John Ellis characterizes as transition from "The First Era of Television: Scarcity" (2002 39-60), during which the UK's single service was challenged by, and adapted to, commercial programming such as Dyer examines; to the second era, "Availability" (61-73), when multiple channels encouraged notions of consumer choice and loyal niche audiences; before the third, "Plenty" (162-178), in which proliferating producers, platforms, devices, opportunities, and interactivity threaten broadcasting, its institutional and economic contexts, and sustaining culture.

Dyer considers how aspects of shows such as set design further obliteration: “it promotes luxuriousness” and creates “glamour, a world of plenty and delight,” the “sumptuousness” of which, and “ease with which the stars inhabit this, points to a fund, or a moment, of unchecked wealth” (1973, 26). In relation to this, Coogan’s anxiety, grumpiness, and vulnerability, exposed in *faux pas* – such as addressing a wine waiter inappropriately according to Brydon – create satire while providing identification for viewers imagining similar embarrassment. Gilbert quotes a culinary historian on how

interest in food as art in contemporary Western culture presupposes an audience satiated and wealthy enough to have the leisure to contemplate foodstuff as conceptual, rather than nourishing, at a time when “knowing about food and being able to discourse about food ... [have become] desirable social attributes” and could be considered “gastronomic capital,” a subset of Bourdieu’s “cultural capital.” (2004, 138-139)

Superiority on which satire depends thus also defuses envy or resentment. An analogy is ideological work whereby stardom has always tempered individual success by incorporating sorrow and suffering (alcoholism, substance abuse, divorce, hounding by the press and stalkers, victimhood from crimes, and so on). Concerning *The Trip*’s undecidability, note that Middleton, citing theorists of documentary ethics, maintains that

Direct Cinema filmmakers ... seek out moments in which subjects contend with failure, because such moments strip people of their defences and compel them to behave in a more revealing manner. Unguarded moments characterized by failure, weakness, or vulnerability are thus linked to truth and authenticity. (2014, 65)

For example, when Coogan hands Brydon what he boasts is his “ten-thousand-dollar Swiss watch” for safekeeping before diving from a yacht, his character manifests unease with his status and situation. In this episode he backhandedly and belittlingly compliments Brydon – “I can see why they want you for Radio 4 panel shows” – before listing Hollywood stars he fraternizes with, just as Byron, he claims, preferred socializing with locals rather than expatriates when travelling. He thereby reveals class anxieties (dismissing Lucy, the deck hand Brydon desires, as a “Sloane Ranger” and “posh girl working on a boat”), about aging and sex (concerns about losing attractiveness and a conversation about Viagra), and career setbacks (he is “in hiatus” following his show’s cancellation). *The Trip to Italy* intensifies truth-versus-fiction dichotomies and raises ethics concerning obliteration, confronting directly Brydon’s real-life former admiration for Jimmy Savile.

Contrast transfers less easily but remains relevant. Acknowledging the real world – any programme must, Dyer notes, to be comprehensible – this tendency “against it celebrates the warmth of the immediate moment” (1973, 26). For Dyer this involved live studio audiences in variety and music shows, to simulate community. By extension, canned laughter in some sitcoms and cartoons attempts to evoke their presence, for “The sound of an audience gives the show a sort of glow – the technology of television is felt to need this tempering note of human warmth” (27). Nevertheless, cerebral and self-consciously alternative shows such as *The Old Grey Whistle Test* (BBC2 1971-88) and *MASH* (Twentieth Century Fox Television 1972-83) were already challenging this; with prevalent concerns about effects, these programmes’ appeal centred on their not being mass indoctrinations into mainstream tastes or attitudes. Similarly, *The Trip* implicitly

addresses a discerning minority. While Brydon and Coogan's characters are oblivious to the audience, as entertainers they stage an extended gag viewers are invited to share in for the programme to work; and sometimes, as when Coogan convulses with apparently genuine laughter at Brydon imitating Michael Parkinson interviewing Coogan, they become appreciative audience members themselves, establishing a relay of identification encouraging or validating responses. In *The Trip*, as in reality television according to Corner, "the public," documentary's traditional concern although its values have ceded some way to market forces, overlaps "the popular" (2002, 265), uniting viewers through consumption of the same text and assumption that others are watching – projecting a community nevertheless fragmented by diverse pleasures, tastes, interests, understanding, attention, address, occasions, and contexts.

Brydon and Coogan's performances simultaneously involve voyeurism (we eavesdrop in private places, such as cars and bedrooms, or in restaurants that, while public, are intimate and exclusive – and in which close attention would breach etiquette) and exhibitionism (as they play not only themselves but portray other personae). Vivian Sobchack quotes Dyer from a different context on how cinema's "as if real" (Dyer 1994, 8) "plunges us into a *mise en abyme* of experiential undecidability" (2004, 58).

Knowledge of performance together with disavowal inculcated by immersive techniques such as classical continuity operate visually and aurally; conversely, these distanced senses elicit bodily reactions. In the *The Trip* these might include the sensation that these performers, characters, and personalities they, or their onscreen versions, embody, are uncannily, corporeally close. "Present absence" central to Metz's account of cinematic experience (1975) – although Sobchack does not explicitly utilise distinction between the

symbolic and the imaginary – is thus compounded by affect, pertinent because it relates to culinary and touristic pleasures; for if “critical discussions often ... suggest that films that appeal to our sensorium are the *quintessence* of cinema” (Sobchack 2004, 57), how might this relate to *The Trip* as television?

Sobchack utilises figure and ground reversibility, analogous to *The Trip*’s fiction/reality, voyeurism/exhibitionism, and cinema/television uncertainties, as a metaphor for all cinematic experience. Rather than subjective or impressionistic interpretations rejected by film theory since the 1970s, the rhetorical figure chiasmus models responses to audio-visual stimuli. Meaning, Sobchack contends, depends on cognition *making* sense of physical evocations while spectators *have* sense of mental associations. Patterned light and sound elicit natural and cultural, bodily and mental feelings and thoughts, reflexes and associations from signs that are culturally encoded; concurrently codes, whereby narrative significance, aesthetic, logical, symbolic and other structures and values operate, are fully graspable only by those sharing the interpretive community’s members’ resources.

*The Trip*’s viewers watch and judge from a privileged position, as if fellow tourists or diners, intimately close to the competitive protagonists’ as each other’s audiences. The format expressly fits qualities Dyer associates with contrast: as Davina Quinlivan states, “ceremonial sharing of food engenders an unmistakable sense of community, warmth and even knowledge since it reminds us of who we are”; and – pertinent to television and cinema – “the visual pleasure of food ... forms as much a part of its ritualistic role as the taste itself” (2014, 46).

Incorporation is Dyer's proposed third ideal:

*Obliteration* blots out the world and *contrast* asserts a community against it: *incorporation* tries to deny that the world is, after all, so bad. Incorporation takes elements of the real world (and ignores others) and so presents them as to assert these elements as positive qualities. (1973, 30)

In *The Trip* fast food, obesity, anorexia, food banks, indigestion and excessive drunkenness are absent. Beyond Brydon's thwarted plea for breakfast, there is little sense of food fulfilling biological need – it is a refined, privileged, aestheticized experience. As Brinkema observes, “the address of cuisine to the eyes,” aligns it “with aristocratic pleasures in eating in place of the necessities of brute repetitive nutrition” (2014, 154).

Incorporation includes *personality*, anticipating Dyer's influential work on stardom. Performers embody connotations and values that are imitable – as Brydon and Coogan's impressions confirm – but not entirely replicable, so that authenticity characterizes the persona. Coogan onscreen is (knowingly) inseparable from Partridge. Incorporation also involves *milieu*:

One of the most often used milieux in all show business is show business itself.... In various ways this is a reference to community – the community of the contrast occasion which stars have provided for people at other points in their career, the community of the profession itself, which is held to fascinate the public at least as much as its members, the community feeling of great names amongst each other. (Dyer 1973, 33)

Brydon and Coogan, generally comfortable and genial together, represent a community signified intertextually by personalities associated with their other work together and separately, but also paratextually for anyone aware of their involvement in these series' production aspects, and by both combined in the industrial status or personal acquaintanceship that enables hiring a Hollywood star, Ben Stiller (uncredited), for Coogan's dream about international success.

*The Trip* problematizes Dyer's "abundance," whereby "necessity and scarcity have been defeated"; although enjoying material ease, Brydon and Coogan scarcely embody "effortless well-being"; and the series, emphasising insecurities about personal lives, careers, and image management, and conversations with distant managers and agents, and the empty penthouse Coogan returns to, acknowledge the cost of "how it is achieved" (1973, 39). While Brydon embraces his wife and child in comfortable suburbia as the first series ends, Coogan misses what "road questers invariably want: an authentic home, a lost origin where what you see is what you are" (Corrigan 1991, 154): he arrives back where each episode reiterates the dramatic premise by rerunning his initial call to Brydon, from an echoing space of cold light and hard surfaces. Certainly "energy" (Dyer 1973, 40), part of abundance, drives constant travelling; work by which ingredients spectacularly, aurally and, indeed, kinaesthetically become cuisine; Coogan's walks in rugged settings; and both comedians' unhesitant wit and competitive performing. So too "community" is celebrated through "warm, close, human togetherness" (39) between characters and the taste milieu viewers implicitly share.

## **6. Authenticity and culinary capital**

*Sideways*, although a literary adaptation, does not proclaim itself as such. It nevertheless demonstrates literary values. Its protagonist, a high school English teacher, is a failed novelist – his potential redemption is romantic closure contingent on his beloved not caring that his book remains unpublished, because it contains beautiful thoughts. They consummate their relationship discreetly off-screen, contrasted against other characters' comic-grotesque lust, pretence and verbally abusive sexual games. The travellers are hypocritical, deceitful, alcoholic and unhappy. The failed author is rescued by choosing honesty. These are angry, middle-aged men *unconsciously* pretending to be what they are not, until one of them gains authenticity.

Coogan and Brydon, conversely, are recognized actors *consciously* pretending, for their own, each other's and viewers' amusement, but equally with undercurrents of romance, poignancy, melodrama and possible but unverifiable glimmers of truth. Corner coined the term "selving" for how reality TV viewers infer from self-conscious performance an underlying "true" personality, which emerges gradually and coheres as the participant responds to "applied pressures of objective circumstance and group dynamics" yet ultimately remains a textual construct (2001, 262).

According to Brydon in *The Trip to Italy*: "'Childe Harold,' Byron wrote, 'was a thinly veiled self portrait'." He suggests they could follow "Childe Steven's" travels – which Coogan rejects because it would not be pseudonymous. Banter continues with Brydon insisting that Alan Partridge is better known than Coogan, whereas he is famous for *The Rob Brydon Show*: "my name is in the title." Underlining uncertainty, he asserts: "I'm an affable man. But my public persona is even more affable than I actually am." He



maintains, concerning a proposed book of their travels (which he, not Coogan, wrote about), how previous articles “lightly fictionalized ... your adventures in the north of England.” Coogan – who has not read them – objects that they are not fictionalized if his name remains in “Steve Coogan’s adventures in the Lake District.” Several impressions later, Brydon refers to his voice-overs for actual commercials. Then in further surreal skits both refer to themselves by their full names. (Published – not onscreen – credits name their characters “Rob” and “Steve.”) The cancelled show that took Coogan to Los Angeles is revealed as *Pathology* – non-existent, although a dig at British comedians in American hospital crime dramas such as *House, M.D.* (Fox 2004-12)

Both *Sideways* and *The Trip*, revivifying metaphors of taste and consumption by centring on food and drink, overlap with emergent cine-literary tendencies such as “culinary memoirs ... known as ‘foodoirs’,” according to Gilbert, who notes that these have displaced romance in popularity (2014, 143), that “‘Let’s eat’ is now a category in my local video store,” and that a new genre “‘the recipe novel’ has countless aficionados, and it’s paralleled by the menu poem and the gastronomic Gothic” (xvi). *The Trip*’s DVD extras provide recipes, anticipating *Grand Budapest Hotel* (2014), which offers “Mendl’s Secret Recipe” for a confection featured in its plot. At the time of writing, a BBC Radio 4 sitcom, *In and Out of the Kitchen* (2011- ), in its third series, follows a cookery writer’s mishaps – interspersed with recipes; episodes include “The Review” (of a restaurant), and “On Location” (the English Lakes for a TV series, “Poets and their Palates”). In what feels like, but isn’t, self-parody, the *Financial Times*’ now anthologised “Lunch with...” column intersperses celebrity profiles with interviews in restaurants and culinary description: “The waiter arrives to take our order. Coogan opts for tuna tartare to start and

then sea bass; I choose steak tartare followed by chicken Milanese. I ask if *Philomena*'[s] critical success feels like vindication after struggling to land big Hollywood parts" (Garrahan 2013)); each ends with restaurant contact details, the selection consumed, prices paid, and the bill, including service and tax.

"Let's eat" videos embrace celebrity cooks, freed from demonstration kitchens to judge competitions, rescue failing businesses, preside over reality-TV transformations of other celebrities into chefs, exude sexuality, confront government in documentaries condemning school meals, or front travelogues to explore overseas cuisines – all spiced with lashings of passion. One curiosity of the award-winning *The Great British Bake-Off* (BBC Two 2010-14; BBC One 2014- ) – which attracts huge ratings – is that, unlike *The X-factor* (ITV 2004- ), *Strictly Come Dancing* (BBC One 2004- ), ice skating competitions, or quiz shows, in which viewers can pit knowledge, taste and discernment against participants' and experts' based on mediated evidence, they can't sense cooking aromas let alone share what judges taste or textures and temperatures. Such programmes' imputed affect suggests projection of the viewer's sensorium, explicable as reaction against false images dished up by advertising; certainly sustained involvement and investment rare in television.

Impressions too create affect, as accent, rhythm, the voice's pace and grain, posture, gestures and facial expressions uncannily evoke – doubly mediated through the impressionist and the event's recording and distribution – not the person, who viewers are unlikely to have encountered, but their persona (further mediated, in that impressions are often conventionalized re-representations of other entertainers' impressions). Stardom or

celebrity amalgamates continuity between performances and specificities of roles. Like a caricature in a political cartoon, or an image of food waiting to be, or being, eaten, the representation demands for satisfactory completion projection of the viewer's memory and desire. That this is intertextual beyond audio-visual recognition (or gustatory recollection and fantasy) explains delight in skilful impressions, which do not require elaborately replicated cinematography, costume, setting and style beloved of some television comedians who revel in parody (notwithstanding *The Trip to Italy*'s "reconstruction" of scenes from costume drama and *The Godfather*, revealed as Brydon dreaming). It accounts also for uncomfortable yet intriguing traces of Brydon and Coogan's other appearances and characters, involving repetition and difference; the possibility they are performing impressions of themselves. This is reinforced when each imitates the other in ways that stress continuity between the performer and a character's less desirable aspects: for instance, Brydon imitating Coogan with hints of Alan Partridge.

Watching cooking and eating involve yet respectively emphasise what Gilbert terms culinary exhibitionism and culinary voyeurism (2014, 203). These mutually dependent, but alternating and different, modes compound ambiguities and uncertainties previously noted. The cool deftness of chopping and slicing, searing and seasoning, rewards the fascinated gaze and stimulates the casual glance, while distancing viewers who, most likely, will be impressed, or, if themselves sufficiently accomplished, critical, but either way arrested by the spectacle. Alternatively, observing somebody eat, and respond to delights of, a gourmet concoction, works affectively. Colours and reflections, densities and resistances meeting utensils, lips, tongue and teeth, and sounds produced, aromas evoked by steam, and the overall milieu, together with body language and facial

expressions, albeit dramatized, and the effect on the voice of commenting while savouring, invite corporeal responses: phantom flavour, texture, and odour, physical salivation, stomach rumbling, or indeed disgust – as when Brydon’s gag that a viscous green drink resembles snot might induce gagging. Sobchack cites

the common experience of those of us who like to cook – and eat – of *tasting* a recipe as we *read* it. ... My eyes read and comprehend the recipe cognitively, but they are not abstracted from my body, which can – albeit in a transformed and somewhat diffused act of gustatory sense-making – taste the meal. (2004, 70)

Conscious and pre-conscious responses – perhaps a spectrum rather than binary opposition – parallel uncertainties epitomised by Coogan before the crucifix.

Sexual frankness from “art films” joined lifestyle qualities of period drama, Collins argues, so that “cine-literary” aesthetics (2010, 164) – multi-platform, pervasive – include culinary, clothing, decorating, and tourism fashions. Literature purveyors offer in-store cafes and sell cookbooks – of which “24,000 are published annually” (Gilbert 2014, 4), presumably in the USA alone – alongside novelizations of films and tie-in paperbacks for adaptations. Gilbert quotes Adam Gornick’s speculation in the *New Yorker* that “Cooking is to our literature what sex was to the writings of the sixties and seventies, the thing worth stopping the story for to share, so to speak, with the reader” (4). Overlap with popular romance readers – hybridity conflates “quality literature with quality passion” so each “*sweeps you away*” (Collins, 164) – makes emotional intensity and authenticity paramount. Those are part of what *The Trip*’s protagonists reveal as, in unguarded moments, sincerity, sensitivity, and vulnerability cut through pretence by which they

make their living.

“Food porn” describes films that stimulate senses directly available to the medium, and metonymically those that are not. The imaginary signifier activates desire. Subjectivity not incidentally involves fantasies of being served, as in restaurant power relations: one orders; food comes, produced by someone who possesses the patriarchal Law – the chef: “the chief” – that controls the nurturing yet is transacted by the diner’s financial power. In film theory, immersion in the diegesis is associated with narrative cinema generally, which has produced its share of foodie features, lauding authenticity and passion:

*Babette’s Feast* (Axel 1987), *Like Water for Chocolate* (Arau 1992), *Ratatouille* (Bird and Pinkava 2007), *The Lunchbox* (Batra 2013), *A Case of You* (Coiro 2013), and *Chef* (Favreau 2014).

Over lunch, the comedians and Coogan’s PR and photographer, both female, in *The Trip to Italy* ridicule the Julia Roberts film *Eat Pray Love* (Murphy 2010) – notwithstanding its cine-literary (and not least “-gustatory”) qualities – implicitly for formulaic adoption, lacking their self-deprecation, of what it purports to revere. According to distributor Sony Pictures’ summary:

Newly divorced and at a crossroads, [Roberts’s character] steps out of her comfort zone, risking everything to change her life, embarking on a journey around the world that becomes a quest for self-discovery. In her travels, she discovers the true pleasure of nourishment by eating in Italy; the power of prayer in India, and, finally and unexpectedly, the inner peace and balance of true love in Bali. (IMDB 2010)

Once authenticity, measured by sensitivity, discrimination, taste, and intense perception, becomes interchangeable with literary values, literature becomes dispensable. It can be metonymically invoked. *Sideways*, *Downton Abbey*, crossover films *Before Sunrise* (Linklater 1995) and *Before Sunset* (Linklater 2004), with period settings or connotations, offer literariness without literature or consequent pangs of inadequacy for not having read it. *Before Sunset*, although not adaptation, emphasizes dialogue and touristic settings: its leads experience authentic romance (contrasted with dutiful marriage) while traversing Parisian streets to an archetypal café, past Notre Dame, on to a river trip (a distant glimpse of the Eiffel Tower underlining avoidance of the obvious, to confirm exclusive taste), to a courtyard of neighbours cooking for each other, a book-piled studio, a Nina Simone CD and chamomile tea with honey. This aspirational primer, recalling 1970s' Woody Allen without the mockery, pre-digests connoisseurship and blurs content with mode of address. The French heroine is an environmental activist with a Masters degree, while her beloved, American jet-setting author of autobiographical literary romance, first appears in Shakespeare & Co. Again, *The Words* (Klugman and Sternthal 2012) is a pseudo-adaptation of a non-existent self-reflexive metafiction about the writing and plagiarism of another non-existent book. Mise-en-abyme piles words upon words in dialogue and embedded narrations; the cult of Hemingway; post-war Paris; unresolved questions of authenticity and self-discovery through writing that is spontaneous and swift rather than considered and controlled; novel-writing and cooking in lofts and penthouses; Central Park walks and public library readings; fine wine; romance and passion; and a setting in celebrity publishing. Yet nothing connects directly with an actual fictional work. More important is its parable about the genesis, loss, discovery, and best-sellerdom of

another book within its diegesis, whose author dismisses fame, fortune or a literary career having torn from his soul his life's work in two weeks' intense authorship – and now, a gentle, wise, if cantankerous old man, spends his time literally nurturing, tending plants in a garden centre.

Analogously *The Trip*, within Public Service Broadcasting's education, information and entertainment remit, addresses cultured viewers through quotation and associations, while offering proximity to literature as signifier of taste; broader endorsement of consumerism embraces food, wine, tourism, cars, décor, clothing, knowledge of movies and classic television, and the possibility that everything is, thanks to its protagonists, guilt-free irony. Simultaneously, however, cine-literary culture celebrates true feeling over shallowness that cineastes and readers traditionally associated with television. Gilbert writes of "Tales of American Culinary Transformation," whereby "consciousness expansion, education and institutionalization" changed that nation's dietary habits thanks to proselytizing by literary expatriates, including Toklas, Stein and Hemingway, who "followed the footsteps of many British travelers" (2014, 17) and described exotic food experiences – a tradition wherein *The Trip*'s US popularity sits. Byron, the Shelleys and other Romantics published strong views about food (Gilbert 2014). Much more recently, "Food writer Mark Bittman and chef Mario Batali have done ... gastronomic tours, most notably an idyllic pilgrimage through Spain with Gwyneth Paltrow and Spanish actress Claudia Bassols" (225), *Spain ... On the Road Again* (2008), for PBS and with a tie-in book. Besides providing a model and, in the USA, potential target, for *The Trip* as middle-aged gourmands travel and dine with slim younger women, the casting is hardly accidental. Paltrow embodies aspirational beauty, success, talent, independence (subsequently

attracting attention for “conscious uncoupling” from Chris Martin and consequent separation ceremony), femininity, lifestyle (her website, Goop.com, calls itself “one of the rare places on the web where food, shopping, and mindfulness collide”), and class – she is famed for English accents, which she loves while hoping her children will not grow up pronouncing “pah-sta” the British way. She moreover personifies cine-literary aesthetics in adaptations such as *Emma* (McGrath 1996) and *Possession* (Labute 2002) and the pseudo-literary *Shakespeare in Love* (Madden 1998) – parables of passion and authenticity, two from Miramax.

*The Trip to Italy*, without visiting Florence, nevertheless embraces tourism, architecture, and sensibility foregrounded in *A Room with a View*, with category slippages and connotations cine-literary taste involves. Consider this viewer’s IMDB posting:

His nearly speeding away from his friend? What was with that? My gut tells me he felt conflicting emotions. The poems were very revealing and an awesome storytelling technique especially the scene in the room where she relates to how the poet couldn't handle the domestic life for too long. It resonated with Steve. ... The stories, both of them ... have tons of options for far more successful films if they're into it. Just don't try too hard is all. It must be organic. Byron becomes more a mentor as well as friend on how to live life well. (aSpiritedConversationist 2014)

The last sentence’s subject, tellingly, is a typo for Brydon, despite him commenting in one episode on near homophony between the names.



Or this:

How fantastic did that yacht look sailing out of the bay? I get a bit teary eyed  
when I see a sail and hear some nice classical music at the same time ...  
impressions of Anthony Hopkins in *The Bounty* top it off! (junstie 2014)

## **7. Flow**

*The Trip* rewards attention to enjoy insider knowledge where taste and cultural capital are concerned. Yet these exceed any viewer's competence. Its content mirrors review and lifestyle sections, and food supplements, of *The Observer*, the broadsheet supposedly financing Brydon and Coogan. Few readers would possess knowledge of, have equal interest in, or take notice of each such ingredient. Hard news surrounds a soft centre comprising travel; columns by television comedians; celebrity; literary, restaurant, motoring, wine and film reviews; relationships; and puzzles – all artily illustrated or photographed and, as with any successful commercial medium, addressing defined levels of taste, experience, education, income, and aspiration to match advertising demographics. *The Trip* similarly encapsulates what a distinct version of contemporary culture values.

Changing locations, situations and impersonations, with minimal causality, render constant attention unnecessary. Comforting and pleasant to look at, the programme nevertheless repays close viewing as when it juxtaposes Coogan's account of his sexual prowess the night before with him expounding on Vesuvius erupting, or when Coogan holding a book in a hotel window seat strikes a Byronic pose from a painting glimpsed two episodes earlier. Allusions to, and expected recognition of, art cinema, auteurism,

and mainstream classics operate at a level consistent with arts programming (Corner's "knowledge"). Aspects not immediately grasped are quickly over. Satisfying immersive gaze associated with theatrical screening, *The Trip* equally presents casual distraction.

Each episode condenses heterogeneous content "flow" Raymond Williams (1974) described as characterizing an evening's schedule. Although contested in the digital age, this concept suggests how *The Trip* functions as a taster menu, no less, of the BBC's prime offerings. Exceptions are programmes for children or family viewing, which its themes and address cannot support; and, significantly, live categories – news, politics and sport – precisely those whose excesses spawned Alan Partridge in response, and to which *The Trip*, always scheduled against BBC One's *News at Ten*, provides an alternative. As BBC Two exists purely to offer license payers an alternative to BBC One, *The Trip* provides enough variety to maintain ratings by discouraging zapping to another broadcaster. While, as Bennett (2014) observes, Winterbottom's generic reconfigurations problematize received notions of Britishness, both the producers' and the audience's knowingness reconfirm belonging to at least some taste communities represented. Thereby identification with and loyalty to the Corporation are encouraged, on which continued funding depends. Of gastronomy Gilbert argues "Our recipes are histories of who we are, transmitting the tastes of the past through precept and example, even as they suggest how we can sometimes revise our lives by adjusting the menu" (2014, 8) – as true also of literary culture and of national public service broadcasting principles *The Trip* and its sequel uphold.

Taste formations and structures of feeling mobilised are hardly new, only their

commercial convergence and social extension. Thomas Gray's journal of his Lakeland tour (1769), a precursor to *The Trip*, is "the first example of modern travel writing" (Murray 2012, 16). Romantic sensibility, beloved of Brydon and Coogan, replaced awe and terror of the Sublime. Moreover tourism, as communications developed, saw the rise of hotels providing luxury and gastronomy, supported by ranks of servants; exportation of stately homes' culture and comforts to distant places where others' recorded responses guided appreciation. Thus pertinent to these programmes' locations is Bill Readings' approach to Williams's cultural studies: literary culture is

where the link forged between a people and its land becomes visible or is expressed. The problems of such a notion of topo-graphy, of land-writing, become apparent once we historically relativize the emergence of literature as the poetry of landscape, and note its links to tourism.... (1996, 95-96)

Showcasing BBC quality and values abroad, and detaining channel hoppers domestically, the programme complements these functions with its internal fragmentation; this facilitates sporadic viewing online and on portable devices, re-capturing some of the potential non-broadcast audience growing exponentially, otherwise lost to the Corporation.

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